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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 24, 2003

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Jelinek Attends Historic Summit in Washington, D.C.

Lawmakers, Education Leaders to Lead State Civics Campaigns

(WASHINGTON, DC) – State Sen. Ron Jelinek (R-Three Oaks) recently attended the First Annual Congressional Conference on Civic Education in Washington, D.C. More than 300 top state officials, legislators, and education leaders from all 50 states participated in the three-day conference where they began mapping out strategies to increase the teaching of civics in their states and change state education requirements and practices.

“There are too many Americans today that choose their right not to vote instead of participating in their government by attending meetings and engaging those that represent them,” Sen. Jelinek said. “These are things that need to be taught in our schools and practiced by adults to help people recognize the value of participation.”

Conference attendees, who heard from representatives from the White House and the U.S. Department of Education, Senators Tom Daschle (D-SD) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN), and former Senator John Glenn, vowed to take action to reaffirm the historic civic mission of the nation’s schools by committing to lead aggressive state campaigns to expand and improve civic education in their schools.

Four key findings overwhelmingly endorsed at the conclusion of the conference were:

- “Civic education should be a central purpose of education essential to the well-being of representative democracy.
- “Civic education should be seen as a core subject. Well-defined state standards and curricular requirements are necessary to ensure civic education is taught effectively at each grade level.”

- Policies that support “Quality teacher education and professional development are important to insure effective classroom instruction and raise student achievement.”
- “Classroom programs that foster an understanding of fundamental constitutional principles through...service learning, discussion of current events, or simulations...are essential to civic education.”

“Since 1972, voter participation by our youngest citizens has declined by one-third,” Jelinek said. “That is why we need to put a renewed emphasis on civic education in our schools and general voting population.”

State delegations included top state legislators, chief state school officers, members of state school boards, governors’ education advisors, as well as state Supreme Court justices, secretaries of state, state attorneys general, school superintendents and other educators.

The historic conference was deemed a success by the Center for Civic Education’s executive director. He stated that “It has gained the support of a wide range of decision makers...that will lead to real results.” He also mentioned that civics education is an on-going process that will gain momentum as participants lead efforts in their home states.

The summit was organized by the Alliance for Representative Democracy, a joint venture of the Center on Congress at Indiana University, the Center for Civic Education, and the National Conference of State Legislatures. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the conference is the first of five planned annual national civic education events.